



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 125

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "STRENGTH-BASED" ORGANIZATION (PART 17)

The Twelve Questions

The need for employees to feel valued -- to know that they really make a difference in their companies and organizations.

Question 7: "At work, my opinions seem to count."

All employees want to feel that they are making significant contributions in their workplaces. The ways organizations hear and process employees' ideas will shape, to a large degree, whether or not they feel valued for their contributions.

The question above is often referred to as employees' "internal stock price." It measures the sense of value that employees feel in their work and toward their organization. The degree to which a company's employees feel their opinions count is readily apparent to its customers. We have all encountered an employee who felt detached or insignificant, and we know the impact that employee's attitude had on us as customers.

If the ideas, instincts and intelligence of a company's employees are its sustained competitive advantage, then employees' responses to Question 7 are of great importance. Nothing is more demoralizing to employees than being excluded from significant decisions -- decisions that affect their jobs. Great managers consult with employees regularly to make sure those close to the action have input into critical decisions. This does not mean that employees have the final say on decisions that affect their jobs. It does mean that when employees' desires and managers' decisions differ, the best managers explain the rationale behind their decisions. These managers use the decision-making process to help employees both to see the full scope of a decision, and to understand why the decision was made the way it was. A straightforward explanation can be a real credibility and communications builder. Great managers never ask employees for their opinions, and then decide to do the opposite, without clearly explaining why.

Great ideas are the building blocks for increased efficiency and new product development. Great places to work, in which employees' opinions count, encourage ideas to flow, and to be heard, processed, and refined. Not all ideas will be successfully implemented, but the process of refining ideas is still wonderfully productive: It builds employees' confidence in the company and reinforces to employees

that their efforts can make the organization better.

Having a clear understanding of how an employee's particular role or job contributes to the company's "reason for being" can be an incredible form of emotional compensation .

Question 8: "The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important."

Excellence happens only when people have a deeply felt sense of purpose in their lives. Human beings want to belong to something that has significance and meaning. They want to know they are making a difference, and are contributing to an important endeavor. The best workplaces give their employees a sense of purpose, help them feel they belong, and enable them to make a difference.

Employees at every level or function like to feel that they belong. Individual achievement is important, of course, but when employees of an organization feel they are an integral part of a larger whole, they are more likely to stay committed to that organization. All of us like to feel as though our Service stands for us, represents us, shares our values, and has the same kinds of goals. It is more exciting to "share a mission" than simply to "complete a task."

Every individual has a different and unique sense of purpose, and individuals find different meanings in similar situations. Thus, designing the usual "mission statement" is not necessarily the solution to helping employees find a sense of purpose in their work. There is nothing wrong with mission statements, but they are often too vague and too broad to allow each employee to connect with them. Think about it. All employees, either consciously or unconsciously, ask themselves, "What is this organization's purpose? Does this organization look at the world in the same way I do?" Employees all want to know whether their purpose meshes with the organization's, and since each one of them looks at the world in a slightly different way, each comes up with a different answer.

Great managers continually strive to help employees understand how the organization's purpose/mission relates directly to the work that employees do. This, in turn, enables employees to find a connection between the organization's purpose and their own. Every employee has different perspectives. Great managers translate the organization's purpose into language that each employee can understand.

Outstanding workplaces never confuse "strategy" with "purpose." Purpose is constant. It is the heartbeat of the organization, and provides the organization with power and guidance. It never changes. Strategy provides the answers to the question, "How will we get to where we are going?" Strategies do change. In fact, organizations devise new strategies all the time as they try to find the most efficient path toward their business goals. If an organization changes strategies regularly, this does not necessarily mean that it lacks a clear purpose. Great organizations emphasize how new strategies support the broader organizational purpose. Great managers always help to keep the distinction clear in each employee's mind.

Next: Question #9 of 12: "My co-workers are committed to doing quality work."

Regards,

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Excerpted from: "*First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*." For more information about the research and book, please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>.



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